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ABSTRACT

Trends in the teaching of Spanish which have developed during the past several decades are reviewed in this article. Criticism is directed especially toward the traditional and audiolingual methods of instruction. The increasingly important role of Spanish in the world is discussed. Observations are directed toward: (1) the traditional, the audiolingual, and the direct audiolingual methods; (2) the importance of Spanish in national security; and (3) concluding remarks. A selected bibliography is included. (RL)

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The Changing Aspects of Teaching Spanish

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ANOTHER ARTICLE on Spanish teaching in the United States may seem like carrying coals to Newcastle when we consider the numerous scholarly articles already done on this subject. The best of these is no doubt the splendid work of Dr. Sturgis E. Leavitt.[1] Yet, however fine these articles may be, they are not sufficiently critical of our increasingly poor texts and methods, especially as found in the widely accepted and officially sponsored audio-lingual method, based upon pedagogical assumptions without proof. A cogent critic says, "Although this stimulus-response view of language stems from a formerly traditional view, it is a fallacious interpretation of language learning today."[2]

The study and teaching of Spanish in our country have generally been of primary importance, next to French. In 1960 Spanish showed the greatest percentage gains, from 29,767 students to 55,430, or 86.2 per cent, compared with 1959, while French was highest in actual numbers, from 55,458 to 87,543, or 57.7 per cent.[3] A recent tabulation of enrollment in the schools of New York City showed Spanish in first place with 90,000 students and French in second place with 73,000.[4]

Except for a few periods of setback, generally found in the study of all foreign languages in our country, the role of Spanish has increased phenomenally in recent years, so that next to English, it is the major tongue of the New World, extremely vital in both popular expression and literary development.

Not only the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America but also our own United States owe a great debt to Spain for her linguistic and cultural influences, which are found in countless monuments, place names, and current words and expressions.

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Our close link with Latin America also points up the importance of teaching and studying Spanish. The Monroe Doctrine stressed our close ties in international affairs. The Pan-American Union (Organization of American States) exemplifies our Good Neighbor Policy and the need for mutual protection. Close and friendly relations are more important today than ever before. Discussing our involvement in Vietnam, the extremes of a Bastista and a Castro in such countries as Cuba, a journalist recently said, "The whole continent of South America—which we ignore at our peril—is rent with the conflicting forces of reaction and revolution. Adherents of the democratic process are pitifully few and weak in almost all South American countries. The decent people have little real choice."[5] A mutual knowledge of both Spanish and English is one of the best ways of accomplishing much needed better relations.

As pointed out by Dr. Leavitt, our interest in and connection with Spanish culture and civilization preceded the American Revolution. Spain settled Mexico some one hundred years earlier than the English settled our Eastern Seaboard. A number of great American writers and statesmen were students and teachers of the Spanish language and literature. Among them were Washington Irving, James Russell Lowell, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, to mention only a few.

The study and teaching of Spanish were emphasized not only for literary but also for practical and commercial values in relation to trade in Latin America, for one writer refers to Spanish as "the language of literature and commerce."[6] Fine commercial courses in Spanish existed from early days in such metropolitan areas as New Orleans, which advertised itself as the Gateway to the Americas, and rightly so, since its International Trade Mart today is second to none in the world. These early practical courses were pioneering ventures in the effective teaching of the spoken language. Some of these commercial schools boasted of their language teaching. Some years ago, the president of the American Association of Teachers of French stressed their competence and good results, telling language teachers that they should try to do as well.[7]

Traditional Methods

While in some of our large metropolitan areas, which had

many Spanish-speaking persons, the teaching and learning of Spanish were accomplished most effectively through the direct use of the language, most of our instruction was by the traditional method, which consisted of readings in Spanish along with exercises to be translated from Spanish into English and from English into Spanish. Some of these early texts were fine scholarly works. This writer learned to love Spanish with one of these entitled *A Spanish Grammar for Beginners,* in which each lesson began with an apt proverb, such as the one from Cervantes, "La pluma es lengua del alma"—"The pen is the tongue of the soul."[8] Many of these traditional texts not only presented Spanish culture but also used many valid devices of teaching. Indeed some of these volumes were far better than some of our poor present-day audio-lingual texts!

Although in a large city, such as New York, Spanish might have been taught in elementary school, this language was generally begun in high school and often continued into college. In high school, elementary grammar was usually covered in a period of two years, to be followed by a review of grammar with composition, possibly accompanied by reading of a practical or cultural nature or both. "Composition" generally meant the translation of sentences from English into Spanish, illustrating textual idioms and difficulties.

Lower-level college Spanish was quite similar and varied only in increased content or rate of coverage. Elementary grammar was covered in one year, to be followed by a review grammar, accompanied by literary or practical readings dealing with the culture of Spain and Spanish America. Although numerous texts might be labelled "conversational," in reality their contents and use in class in general paid only lip-service to an oral method. While in many areas a reading knowledge of the language was the main objective, in some areas, such as New Orleans, both a conversational and a cultural ability in Spanish were required and ultimately achieved, but this high level of achievement has declined today because of regimentation into the audio-lingual method, which demonstrates "unprecedented activity—though not necessarily unprecedented success."[9]

University courses in Spanish emphasized the teaching of the language and literature in English rather than in Spanish. Such large institutions as the University of Chicago and the

University of North Carolina stressed the study of Old Spanish, dwelling in great detail on the minute study of philology. After long years of study, a person with an American doctorate in Spanish might have had many courses in Spanish literature and philology and not be able to speak the language. In fact a recent article criticizes the poor Spanish usage at present among American teachers.[10] Promotion and progress in one's profession of teaching depended and still depend largely on the number of literary and philological articles published in the various university quarterlies.

Most teachers on upper levels have in the past held themselves aloof from any discussion of or interest in methods or the teaching of lower-level courses while concerning themselves with esoteric literary questions. Some of the language quarterlies, such as *Hispanic Review,* contain only literary articles of an exclusive nature. Although some language journals, such as *Hispania* and *The Modern Language Journal,* will publish articles concerned with practical methodology and the like, most of them and their contributors concern themselves with literary criticism only. There is much need today for an all-out examination of learning, studying, and teaching practices on all levels from grade school through the university.

A major in Spanish often minored in French or vice versa. At the University of North Carolina a candidate for the doctorate was usually made to study the gamut of all the Romance languages including all the various dialects, both ancient and modern. This involved and still involves a long curriculum of courses in philology and related fields.

Less successful candidates for the doctorate might well find a position teaching both Spanish and French in some godforsaken area or perhaps teaching Spanish and coaching football. This spreading out of teaching in several fields, while the teacher may not know any one language thoroughly, has been one of the main faults of teacher and student preparation. There is a great need for teachers who are expertly trained in their specialty of Spanish. If there is not sufficient teaching for a teacher in one school, he might well share his time with another school in the community or nearby vicinity.

Many critics warn that prosperity in language teaching may indeed be short-lived unless we take careful stock, for such afflu-

ent conditions have not always existed. We have but to recall our Great Depression of 1929, around which time it was concluded that the aim of foreign language teaching was to teach only a bare reading knowledge.[11] Although some language teachers, including this writer, rejected such a defeatist trend, lean years followed, and language teachers generally apologized for their profession. Students would tell somewhat sheepishly of having had one or two years of Spanish and of not being able to utter anything in Spanish, except a couple of phrases. Consequently because of curricular changes and laxity, the classics and content subjects, such as modern languages, gradually declined in our schools, to be replaced by social studies and life adjustment courses. In our emphasis on mass education, elite subjects suffered in enrollment and prestige.

In the early 1940's, during the Second World War, language teaching in the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), conducted in such institutions as the University of North Carolina, where this writer was teaching at the time, pointed up the inadequacy of traditional methods. New ideas and methods were developed. The concept of area studies was created, which included not only the literature of the region but also its many political, social, and economic aspects. Native teachers were employed using the direct method. This writer used visual aids in his class with success. Foreign films were presented along with other social activities involving conversation with native speakers on the campus. Subsequent studies from this short-lived program, which was somewhat frowned upon by traditional teachers, served to focus attention on our weaknesses and to create a demand for better language teaching.

The so-called "Army Method," used in the above program, is sometimes mistakenly equated with the current audio-lingual method, which was really developed somewhat later.

An atmosphere of change became apparent. In 1953 Earle McGrath, then Commissioner of Education, stressed at St. Louis the importance of foreign languages even in elementary education and invited leaders and administrators to meet with him in Washington. The program of Foreign Languages in Elementary Schools (FLES) was launched.

As explained in this writer's chapter on "The Language Laboratory," our technological revolution considerably increased

not only our media of travel but of communication, so that space and time are literally being annihilated, giving us a power somewhat comparable to that of the Seven-League Boots found in the tale of "Jack and the Beanstalk" and to that of Aladdin in the tale of "The Wonderful Lamp." Certainly space travel and television have helped to reveal most clearly the importance of speaking a foreign language. In any case the numerous electronic devices, which produced the language laboratory, helped spark a language revolution.

The launching of Sputnik by the Russians in 1957 revealed our inadequacy in both science and foreign languages. Our country then was ready for and demanded a change; consequently the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was established, whose initial purpose and intent was to improve the quality of education in sciences and foreign languages.

Traditional language teachers, opposed to change, defaulted in their leadership, which they surrendered to other fields,[12] such as English, education, psychology, and anthropology, and to an avant-garde group of so-called structural linguists dedicated to a mechanistic method of teaching languages centered around the use of electronic devices. Under government subsidy language laboratories were set up in many schools along with summer institutes for teachers.

Alongside our traditional methods there had also existed for some years good direct methods in such institutions as Middlebury College and other private schools. At this time these better methods might have been adopted except that most language teachers were not fluent enough in the foreign languages to use such methods, which demanded a thorough speaking knowledge of the foreign tongue.

A Crash Method

Consequently, to meet mass demands, a makeshift crash method was developed and adopted, subsequently called the "New Key" and later the audio-lingual method. This latter method was contrived by the structural linguists who based their findings on Pavlovian psychology of the conditioned reflex. Language was stated to be a habit which must be taught by a "scientific" method, especially based around the mechanistic means of the language laboratory. This mechanical method along with the

laboratory was presented as the logical solution for the impasse, for both teacher and student would presumably be trained by it while using it. It also served to drive out better direct methods, for the audio-lingual method became a sort of official dogma or canon of methodology.[13]

The faults do not lie in the mechanical devices of the laboratory but rather in their improper use through the procedures of the audio-lingual method. Many articles already cited elsewhere stress the weaknesses and inadequacies of this makeshift crash method. Meras' excellent article summarizes these, and he suggests our return to the good direct methods which existed in our better private schools.[14]

A recent article by Professor Hamilton contends that the audio-lingual method is a fad, although he does not offer a better alternative.[15] Professor Barrutia's reply to him begs the question. He unconvincingly answers several severe critics: A. F. Gronberg,[16] Venita Booth,[17] and Thomas R. Palfrey.[18]

Barrutia cites not only the above writers to his detriment but especially this passage from Miss Booth: "To build an entire course of study around dialogue-memorization, however, denies the student the opportunity of using the analytical skills he has learned since he began school and thereby refutes the whole purpose of public education."[19] Moreover, Barrutia displays questionable scholarship, indeed, for another point to his discredit is that the first sentence and the last two sentences of his presumed quotation from Miss Booth's article are not found in her article, certainly not in the context he presents them.[20]

Barrutia's assumption as well as that of other proponents of the audio-lingual method is that all opponents of their method are traditionalists. This writer and a number of others, such as Meras, point to a better method than both the traditional and the audio-lingual, that is, the direct audio-visual method.[21] For some years now this method has been used most successfully by the Alliance Française and its branches in the teaching of French.[22] This writer first explained these methods in an earlier article.[23]

Better Audio-Visual Method

At West Virginia Wesleyan, where the writer is chairman of the Department of Romance Languages, audio-visual methods

are being used with much success in both French and Spanish on the lower levels. In French we are using the excellent texts of Gaston Mauger, *Cours de langue et de civilisation françaises.* In Spanish on the elementary level, I. A. Richards' *Spanish Through Pictures* is being used by Robert Green with good results. Also Ugarte's *Gramática española de Repaso,* a completely Spanish text, is being used on the second-year level quite successfully, along with readings in Spanish and Spanish American literature.[24] On all levels classes are being conducted in Spanish most of the time.

There is a great need in Spanish, however, for a good visual text similar to Gaston Mauger's first volume of *Cours de langue et de civilisation françaises,* somewhat modified and amplified perhaps to suit different needs.

A number of critics of the New Key have returned or have expressed a wish to return to the traditional method of teaching, or have suggested taking a middle course combining what is presumably best of the traditional and of the audio-lingual methods. The writer in one of his earlier articles pointed out how he returned to a traditional text after floundering around in a program with only a very elementary reader and no grammar at all.[25] Miss Booth tells of her fruitless efforts with the audio-lingual method and how she and her students gladly returned to traditional methods. Hamilton suggests an eclectic course between the audio-lingual and the traditional. He espouses, however, *Modern Spanish,* which is one of the most audio-lingual of texts, and thus retreats from his position of having been anti-audio-lingual and begs the question, to say the least.

As pointed out in the writer's article cited above, the student usually comes very late to the study of Spanish, often after reaching high school or even college. He has no time to waste in duplicating courses or in makeshift learning methods. Every minute counts, and he must put his time to the best and most effective use.

One of the greatest lacks in our present-day foreign language curriculum is the coordination of overlapping and repetitious courses, reflecting the over-all absence of any planned direction in both study and teaching.[26]

A contradictory situation has existed and still exists in graduate university foreign language work. While present-day

requirements demand primarily of the student a writing and speaking knowledge of the language, many institutions still require the writing of long graduate research papers, including theses and dissertations in English, which often amount to academic busy-work and which require years of time and effort. At least, as some better institutions of higher learning require, such research should be in the foreign language. In any case, the average student should spend most of his time in achieving a language proficiency and over-all cultural knowledge.

As Germaine Brée aptly pointed out, we have the dual responsibility of teaching both language and literature, and this must be done by the best methods, which is not the case today, as pointed out by the above critic of our banal and "degrading" dialogue methods.[27]

In criticizing one of his student teacher's audio-lingual classes in Spanish, Dr. Meras says, "If this is typical, and I hear that it is, it would seem that the inflexibility of the total memorization system does not train students to adapt themselves even in a class with the same teacher for any variations of the fixed pattern."[28]

The above pointed criticism and the half dozen others cited cogently by Dr. Meras, not to mention the many others stressed by numerous critics from the past several years, certainly do bring into question the validity of an audio-lingual text such as *Modern Spanish*, despite its official acceptance and backing, for all the faults mentioned by these critics most aptly apply to this latter text.[29]

Immediately after the above passage, Dr. Meras tells of the far better results obtained from a direct visual approach in language teaching: "My own experience as well as that of colleagues with a Direct Method approach has shown that even before the end of the first year almost all students can follow an impromptu talk in the foreign language, especially if it is illustrated."[30]

In the key word "illustrated," Dr. Meras touches the kernel of his entire article, which is a plea for using direct audio-visual methods in foreign language teaching.

Our main problem has been and still is that of needing better-trained teachers. One article shows that the need for better-

trained teachers in foreign languages is an even greater problem on college and university levels.[31]

The plethora of "guidelines" laid down in a recent official report reveals inner weaknesses of philosophy and method in language teaching throughout the United States.[32]

Our whole FLES program needs to be revitalized through the better audio-visual methods. It needs expert teachers, possibly from Spanish-speaking countries. The state of Indiana has made excellent strides in this direction in its grass-roots program.[33]

Despite poor and inadequate methods, Spanish teaching and learning in our country has always done fairly well because of our proximity to Latin America, which affords the possibility of easy contact with Spanish-speaking persons. There are numerous fine summer schools in Mexico and in other Latin countries. We need to take greater advantage of these. For some years now the cost of living in Spain has been most reasonable, and travel in Spain offers excellent opportunities for language practice and study. Such travel needs to be encouraged more and more through intensified student and faculty exchange programs.

Importance of Spanish in National Security

Our very survival may depend on the more effective spread of both English and Spanish between the Northern and Southern hemispheres. This writer was surprised to note the very poor methods of teaching English to Latin-American students in our country. Our same anti-intellectual audio-lingual methods are being used with them.

Professor Robert Mead in a recent article points out that our image in and relations with Latin America need improving, to say the least. He concludes, "Most of *Hispania's* readers are teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, and there is no need to remind them of the rewards and satisfactions which can be theirs if they will but set as their ultimate goal the improvement of international understanding in the Americas."[34] This same point was stressed by a writer some ten years ago: "We have been accustomed to consider languages as a part of liberal education. Let us learn to consider them as an imperative for international relations and national security."[35]

While visiting in Mexico recently, this writer found out

clearly why an ability to speak Spanish helps us to win friends in such countries. As a Mexican friend stated: "Do you know why we liked Mrs. Kennedy so much? Well, it was because she spoke Spanish and was so friendly!"

Every week the writer receives materials advertising various methods of teaching Spanish, usually involving quite expensive materials purchasable under NDEA subsidy through taxpayers' money, and assuring the speedy and effective teaching and learning of Spanish. While some of this material is worthy of note, most of it is not.

We have been witnessing a revolution, not only in the teaching and learning of Spanish, but also of other foreign languages. For the most part, the very same conditions and problems are prevalent in all. As in the case in all revolutions, however, there has been a growing trend toward a doctrinaire philosophy and methodology in teaching and learning foreign languages.

Time to Take Stock

Quoting the psychologist John Carroll, from his address delivered in Berlin at the International Conference on Modern Language Teaching, September 5, 1964, Dr. Meras said "There should be a rethinking of current theories of foreign language teaching to keep up with psychological theory."[36]

In this same vein another important critic said, "A clearcut viewpoint on the teaching of foreign languages has emerged and is being increasingly adopted in the schools. The time has now come for a critical appraisal of this method, in the light of the most recent conclusions on the learning process."[37]

Stressing the need for a "basic philosophy in foreign language teaching," another critic said, "I believe both native and non-native teachers should be concerned, above all, with an efficient method, suitable text materials, the development of efficient techniques, and the discussion of problems encountered in the classroom in order to avoid the deadly dull aspects of foreign language instruction of the past."[38] One might also add that if traditional instruction of the past was "deadly dull," current lockstep procedure of the anti-intellectual method exemplified in such texts as *Modern Spanish* is far worse, yet this text is endorsed by over a score of teachers and linguists. This is the paradox against which there is ever-growing criticism.

In summary, we have noted in the United States three methods of teaching Spanish: the traditional, the audio-lingual, and the direct audio-visual. "The third method can best be taught by one who is fluent in the language. While the poorly trained teacher may feel more at ease in the first two methods, the truly creative and well-trained teacher will feel limited and frustrated in these and much freer and at home in the latter method."[39]

CALVIN ANDRE CLAUDEL, chairman of the Romance Language Department, West Virginia Wesleyan College, Buckhannon, West Virginia, earned his B.A. and M.A. and his Phi Beta Kappa at Tulane University; and his Ph.D. in Romance Languages and Literature at the University of North Carolina. He has been a Diplômé de la Sorbonne; Chevalier dans l'ordre des Palmes Académiques; Lauréat de l'Athénée Louisianais, member of the Paul Claudel Society; Vice-President of l'Athénée Louisianais; past president, Louisiana State Poetry Society. A specialist in medieval and modern French literature, Dr. Claudel has taught at the University of North Carolina, Saint Louis University, and Beloit College. His work has appeared in *PMLA, French Review, Hispania, Kentucky Foreign Language Quarterly, New Mexico Quarterly, Georgia Review, Journal of American Folklore, Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, and others. He is listed in *Who's Who in the South and Southwest, Directory of American Scholars, Who Knows and What, Who's Who in the East*, etc.

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to his discredit.

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